

# First Annual Report

OF THE

## Board of Park Commissioners

Seattle, Wash.

1884-1904

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The owners of the land along Beacon Hill Parkway would do well to sell lots fronting upon it with a building limit line restriction, and with a minimum cost of house restriction, and with a restriction against more than one family living on each lot. There can be no doubt that such restrictions in the long run would make the land along the parkway much more valuable than if the front land should be left unrestricted. It would be desirable to secure a few acres of level, or nearly level land east of west of the Renton electric railway, in connection with this parkway, to be used as a playground and local park, particularly for the benefit of the dense population which is likely to grow up eventually in this valley.

### Duwamish Parkway.

It would be desirable, particularly for those interested in fast horses, to extend a parkway from the south end of Beacon Hill Park to the Driving Park in the flat land adjoining Duwamish River. This parkway should, if possible, be arranged with three drives on the comparatively level ridge for more than a mile south of the park, the central drive to be used as a speedway, the eastern one as a pleasure drive for slower driving, and the western one for heavy traffic. From the south end of the speedway southward the parkway may have two driveways only, and should descend gradually on the west slope of the hill to a bridge over the steam and electric railroads, beyond which there should be an incline descending to a pleasure drive surrounding the race track.

### Volunteer Hill Parkway.

One of the most desirable, and probably one of the most immediately profitable, branch parkways would be that which would connect Washington Park with Volunteer Park, following part of the way the west crest of the hill, upon the summit of which is Volunteer Park. From Washington Park the parkway would rise gradually to as great a height as practicable, with a width of two hundred to three hundred feet, varying according to the steepness of the land. In approaching the wooded ravine about a quarter of a mile north of the improved part of the Capitol Hill Addition, it should widen out so as to include a considerable area of beautiful woods on ridges and in the ravines as far as the street bounding Holy Cross Cemetery on the east. This widening is desirable, not only to preserve the woods in these ravines, but also because the land is so exceedingly broken and steep that it would cost more than it would be worth to properly fit it for occupation by dwellings, making it desirable to head off ill-advised attempts to subdivide it for that purpose. The parkway would then be continued westerly on straight lines and with a width of one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet, with two driveways to the bluff northwest of the end of the Broadway electric car line. It would then turn southward along the bluff west of Tenth avenue, which

would form its easterly boundary, nearly to East Howe street. The westerly boundary would depend upon the cost of land. It should at least be far enough below the crest of the bluff to enable the view to be controlled. It would be much better to extend the boundary far enough down the hill to include all, or nearly all, of the wooded steep slope, even that below the bicycle path. This slope is not only too steep to build on economically and conveniently, but is much broken by ravines, so that it would be very expensive to grade it for streets and lots, and it is also liable to landslides; hence it would be a good investment for the city to take all this steep land in order to prevent its occupation by streets and houses. At East Howe street a deep ravine cuts into Tenth avenue, and it would be advisable to extend the parkway over to the eastward sufficiently to secure a width of at least 150 feet above the bluff. When this narrow place is passed, it would probably be best to have the easterly boundary parallel with the electric railway, and sufficiently far from it to provide for a double tier of lots, one facing on the railway street and the other on the parkway. The pleasure drive should be carried on curving lines, close to the crest of the bluff, except where to do so would make it excessively crooked. A little north of East Highland Drive a deep ravine, with very steep sides, extends to Tenth avenue, in which at this point are the electric car tracks. At this point it would probably be desirable to turn the parkway east to Volunteer Park, perhaps on a diagonal or curving route to secure good grades. Eventually a bridge could be thrown across the ravine, from the point where Harvard avenue intersects East Highland Drive, thus providing convenient access from an important residential district to the parkway without the awkward detour of Tenth avenue. It would be desirable in that case to widen Harvard avenue a little, so that the parking spaces could be made more liberal and to secure a building limit line, so there would be always ample front dooryards or lawns in front of the houses. If a similar treatment could be adopted for one of the avenues east of the electric railway running northward from Lincoln Park, another agreeable pleasure driving approach would be provided.

#### Queen Anne Hill Parkway.

An informal parkway is desirable to extend from the extreme northwest corner of Queen Anne Hill to the proposed local park on the summit of the hill. Beginning at the corner of Twelfth avenue and Nickerson avenue, the parkway would steadily rise with grades varying from three to six per cent., but averaging about five per cent., and would bend into the ravines and out around the spurs until it reaches the top of the steep bluff at the corner of Howe street and Taylor avenue; or it might be carried a block or two further west. It would then run westerly and then southerly, connecting with Highland Drive or Prospect street, and following Galer street would end

waterfront park. The population on a considerable area north of Lake Union would be distant from Woodland Park, and would be greatly benefited by this little park or playground.

#### Lake Union Parks.

One or more small parks, which may have playgrounds in them, are desirable on the east and south shores of Lake Union. Three good sites are available. The choice between them will depend largely upon the price of land. It would be wise to secure these parks while there is a choice, and while they may be obtained at a comparatively small cost. The most important one, because nearest to a large population which is destined to become very dense, and which at the same time is most in need of access to Lake Union, would be between Minor Avenue North and Boren Avenue North, and from Valley street to the lake. Another would be between East Boston street and East Newton street, and from Melrose avenue to the lake. Another would be from Shelby street to Hamlin street and from Eastlake avenue to the lake. While this is a very pleasing site, it is not as conveniently situated nor as useful for playground purposes as the previous one.

#### Other Small Parks.

If the needed land for local parks at various places where there are fine views, and where there are opportunities for playgrounds, are not secured in connection with the system of parkways, they should be secured as independent small parks. Except to thus call attention to them, it will be unnecessary to describe them individually, as they have already been sufficiently referred to in describing the general parkway system.

### Suggestions as to Existing Parks

The city already possesses four parks of fair size and six small parks, averaging perhaps five acres. Some suggestions may be offered in regard to these parks, particularly as to those which are as yet unimproved.

#### Volunteer Park.

The boundaries of this park are not satisfactory. It should be extended to the nearest streets on the south and west, both for the sake of the dignity of facing upon a street and because it is very undesirable to have the rear premises of private residences backing on the park. This park is situated on the summit of one of the high hills of the city, and at present commands fine distant views; but the park is so little above adjoining private property that houses, and particularly trees to be planted on the properties and in the streets, will in time completely shut out all distant views. Thus almost all of the



advantages of having this park located on the top of a high hill will be lost. It may be worth while, therefore, in time to erect an observation tower at the summit, sufficiently high to enable visitors to overlook all the surrounding trees, and large enough to accommodate considerable numbers without discomfort.

A portion of the park has been cleared and turned into lawns, which are more or less cut up by walks and spotted with flower beds, shrubs and small trees. The aim should be to secure at least one notably large unbroken lawn. As this lawn would be just as beautiful, and possibly more so, if graded with graceful surfaces, so that large portions of it would be more nearly level, while the borders would be steeper, and as such a nearly level lawn would be more useful for lawn tennis, tether ball, and other lawn games suitable in such a park, it seems desirable to undertake such grading.

The walks should in general be planned for two purposes—one to afford views over the broadest possible lawns, with foregrounds of trees and shrubbery, which purpose would in general best be accomplished by having curving walks near the borders of the park; and for the purpose of affording reasonably direct and convenient lines of communication across the park. This park is too small to warrant the introduction of a circuit drive merely for the purpose of affording a pleasure drive, but it may be desirable to introduce a drive to afford access to the tower, or before the tower is built to a concourse terrace, which for some years would command the distant views. If the proposed Volunteer Hill Parkway is laid out to connect with this park, it will, of course, be necessary to run a drive from it through the park to the view terrace and future observation tower.

The present greenhouse is ugly and much too prominent, and the rows of plants and cultivated ground in connection with it are also too conspicuous and encroach upon and mix up with the curvilinear walks and irregular plantations in a disagreeable manner. The residence of the superintendent and the park barn and administration buildings and yards, together with the greenhouse, nursery and compost yard, should be grouped in some less valuable part of the park, probably next the cemetery and in the northwest corner.

The existence of the cemetery north of the park is an advantage in that it affords a sense of amplitude lacking where such a park is completely surrounded by houses. But the cemetery fence, and the mass of white and light-colored monuments are disagreeable in the park views, and should be screened out as well as possible by means of evergreen shrubbery, avoiding the use of too many trees, however. In order to control short-cutting, it will probably be necessary to have a fence covered with vines all about the park, with gateways at suitable places.

As it seems to be the intention to make a feature of flowers in this park, it should be constantly borne in mind that this purpose ought to be accomplished in a thoroughly formal manner, or in as

informal a manner as possible. At present formal beds are scattered promiscuously in portions of the ground, treated in other respects informally. There should be an association of formal flower beds with some strong architectural features of formal design, or there should be a definite area set aside and designed and improved as a strictly formal flower garden. It should for the most part be separated from the informal portions of the park by shrubbery plantations. Almost all tender and annual plants should be confined to such a formal garden. Perennial plants, or such as lend themselves to an informal and more natural style of landscape gardening, may be set out along the shrubbery borders, where the circumstances are such that it can be done appropriately.

There should at least be low shrubbery along the borders of the park next the streets.

The number of fir trees should be very greatly reduced. If they are allowed to remain crowded they will grow up into tall, crowded masses, which may look well at a distance, but would be less beautiful near at hand than trees given ample room in which to spread their branches. There being no rugged topography in this park, and as it will be best to adopt a neat and smooth style of landscape gardening throughout, thus harmonizing the park with its surroundings and making it contrast with the outlying parks, and those having rugged topography, in which a wild style and greater respect for the preservation of the natural forest undergrowth would be appropriate and most desirable. Another reason for eliminating most of the fir trees from this park is that they are associated in the mind with wild surroundings, and hence are not quite appropriate on clipped lawns. For the same reason the crowded, wild undergrowth should be gradually replaced by suitable exotic shrubbery. The different parks of the city should not be made to look as much like each other as possible, but on the contrary every advantage should be taken of differing conditions to give each one a distinct individuality of its own.

#### Kinnear Park.

While this park is equal to three or four blocks in area, much of it is so steep as to be unavailable, except to look over. It is situated southwest of the summit of Queen Anne Hill, on a steep bluff, which is here from 150 to 200 feet high. Most of the native forest which covered it is gone, but a few tall fir trees remain, and a considerable number of native deciduous and broad-leaved evergreen trees and shrubs survive. The moderately sloping area above the bluff which is not occupied by native trees and shrubs has been turned into lawns, with winding paths, and trees and shrubs of a more or less exotic character have been added. The park is pleasing in detail and extremely valuable, owing to the fine views which it commands over the Sound. It

"Volunteer Park" from  
Parks, Playgrounds and Boulevards of Seattle, Washington, Issued by the  
Board of Park Commissioners, 1909

Volunteer Park, consisting of approximately forty-eight acres, located in a commanding position north of the fashionable Capitol Hill district is considered by many to be the most attractive and park-like of all the city pleasure grounds. Its extensive lawns, beautiful slopes, rose gardens, flowering shrubs and ornamental flower beds give it a pleasing appearance and its location makes it a favorable recreation center.

From a scenic point of view, Volunteer Park occupies the highest vantage ground in the city, from which may be seen a panorama of lake, mountains, suburban and rural scenery which is incomparable. On the south margin of the park is the city's high pressure reservoir, adjoining which is the huge water tower or stand pipe encased in the vitrified brick, around which vines entwine, the base being beautified by a series of terraces planted with flowers. A stairway leads to the top of the water tower on which is located an observatory from which the wide expanse of surrounding scenery can be enjoyed to a degree of perfection, it being without question the most commanding view point in the city.

Prior to this year about one-half of Volunteer Park had been improved with lawns, flowers, driveways, and by-paths, which with the growth of native fir, pine, hemlock, alder, madrona, give a very attractive blending of the artificial with the natural. Early this year, however, the Board decided that as Volunteer Park was practically the down town park, that it should be completely developed and improved along formal lines and with this in view a large amount of work has been done this year and is now in progress to completely improve this park, as per detailed plans by Olmsted Brothers. These plans provide for a children's playground for the southwest corner of the park, with a complete set of modern apparatus and equipment, symmetrical paths and driveways with flowered terraces, a music pavillion, conservatory, keepers' lodge and barns and all of the features of a modern metropolitan park.

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Description of Proposed Parks and Parkways: Volunteer Hill Parkway

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about a quarter of a mile north of the improved part of the Capitol Hill Addition, it should widen out so as to include a considerable area of beautiful woods on ridges and in the ravines as far as the street bounding Holy Cross Cemetery on the east. This widening is desirable, not only to preserve the woods in these ravines, but also because the land is so exceedingly broken and steep that it would cost more than it would be worth to properly fit it for occupation by dwellings, making it desirable to head off ill-advised attempts to subdivide it for that purpose. The parkway would then be continued westerly on straight lines and with a width of one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet, with two driveways to the bluff northwest of the end of the Broadway electric car line. It would then turn southward along the bluff west of Tenth Avenue, which would form its easterly boundary, nearly to East Howe Street. The westerly boundary would depend upon the cost of the land. It should at least be far enough below the crest of the bluff to enable the view to be controlled. It would be much better to extend the boundary far enough down the hill to include all, or nearly all, of the wooded steep slope, even that below the bicycle path. This slope is not only too steep to build on economically and conveniently, but is much broken by ravines, so that it would be very expensive to grade it for streets and lots, and is also liable to landslides; hence it would be a good investment for the city to take all this steep land in order to prevent its occupation by streets and houses. At East Howe Street a deep ravine cuts into Tenth Avenue and it would be advisable to extend the parkway over to the eastward sufficiently to secure a width of at least 150 feet above the bluff. When this narrow place is passed, it would probably be best to have the easterly boundary parallel with the electric railway, and sufficiently far from it to provide for a double tier of lots one facing on the railway street and the other on the parkway. The pleasure drive should be carried on curving lines, close to the crest of the bluff, except where to do so would make it excessively crooked. A little north of East Highland Drive, a deep ravine, with very steep sides, extends to Tenth Avenue, in which at this point are the electric car tracks. At this point it would probably be desirable to turn the parkway east to Volunteer Park, perhaps on a diagonal or curving route to secure good grades. Eventually a bridge could be thrown across the ravine, from the point where Harvard Avenue intersects East Highland Drive, thus providing convenient access from an important residential district to the parkway without the awkward detour of Tenth Avenue. It would be desirable in that case to widen Harvard Avenue a little, so that the parking spaces could be made more liberal, and to secure a building limit line, so there would be ample front dooryards or lawns in front of the houses. If a similar treatment could be adopted for one of the avenues east of the electric railway running northward from Lincoln Park, another agreeable pleasure driving approach would be provided.

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#### Suggestions to Existing Parks: Volunteer Park

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#### Improvement of Volunteer Park

As requested, I have visited Volunteer Park in reference to the improvements of the portion west of the reservoir.

It has been suggested by citizens that it would be desirable to have a playground in this section of the park. I have spent two days in the study of a grading plan for this section of the park and various modifications of the same. I submit a partially

completed grading plan showing drives, walks and a hard gravel area which would accommodate considerable apparatus for children's play.

Since we made our preliminary plan in September, 1904, the strip of land one hundred feet wide lying between the park and Federal Avenue has risen so much in value that it now seems to the Board, as I understand it, too expensive to add it to the park, as would be most desirable to afford the park a dignified street frontage. The remaining space between the park's west boundary and the foot of the reservoir embankment is only one hundred thirty-five feet.

It seems important to have a circuit drive in the park below the reservoir. This, with the accompanying walk and the steepest possible slopes, uses up so much of the space that the proposed playground can be only fifty-two feet wide at its south end, but can be seventy-four feet near its north end. It seems desirable to have an entrance drive from 11th Avenue, not shown on our preliminary plan. If this is introduced the south end of the playground will be 230 feet from Prospect Avenue and its length will be 345 feet.

The proposed drives and accompanying walks will involve considerable grading but the playground can be leveled independently and at comparatively trifling cost. The design provides for a special walk to the playground from Prospect Street, so that the playground can be made ready in a short time without regard to the grading for the drives.

I will state that having already been paid for plans for this park we will gladly prepare grading and planting plans for it without charge, except for the services of our assistants and incidental expenses. As I understand a considerable further improvement of this park is now to be undertaken, I think it most desirable that we should be directed to prepare grading and planting plans for the guidance of your Superintendent.

(signed) John C. Olmsted